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## Pro leagues asked to air tolerance message

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Mercury News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Rep. Mike Honda, who was sent to a Japanese-American internment camp during World War II, is spearheading an effort by some members of Congress to have messages of tolerance broadcast at professional sporting events to help end the ethnic backlash that has followed the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Honda, a Democrat from San Jose, drafted a letter to the commissioners of the four major sports leagues playing now -- baseball, football, hockey and soccer -- asking that the messages be broadcast on public address systems or shown on video screens during games.

"The important role that sport plays in the lives of Americans affords you unique access to the public at a pivotal time in our history," Honda wrote in a letter that was signed by 31 other members of Congress. Among the signers are four other Bay Area Democrats: Zoe Lofgren of San Jose, Anna Eshoo of Palo Alto, Sam Farr of Monterey and George Miller of Concord. Also signing were Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, D-Mo., and Rep. Tom Osborne, R-Neb., the former University of Nebraska football coach.

"As America gets back to work, and the rebuilding process begins in New York and Washington, D.C., we have an obligation to help heal the nation by promoting and protecting our highest ideals of liberty, due process and diversity," wrote Honda. "We are . . . deeply concerned about reports of violence and threats of violence against Arab-Americans, Islamic Americans and others in the wake of this horrible tragedy."

Honda said he got the idea when he heard that baseball would replace the singing of "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" during the seventh-inning stretch with "God Bless America" in light of the attacks.

"I want the American public to see this in every context in every possible venue," said Honda, who added that his childhood experience with wartime hysteria has fueled his push for tolerance. "How many millions of people watch football?"

The NFL is considering Honda's request, spokesman Greg Aiello said. Broadcasting such a message, either in stadiums or on television during NFL games, already had been discussed in the league's offices, he said.

Officials from other leagues could not be reached for comment. Malcolm Bordelon, executive vice president of business operations for the Sharks, said the team would wait for some guidance from the NHL, but would consider broadcasting such a message if the league did not go along.

Arab-American and Islamic groups have tried to promote tolerance after numerous reports of attacks on people wearing turbans or looking as if they are of Arab or Middle Eastern descent. President Bush has urged

tolerance since the attacks, including visiting a Washington mosque last week.

``We've seen a lot of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab backlash in the past two weeks, and I think we need to keep reinforcing the message that America is a diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-religious society," said Ibrahim Hooper, spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations. ``We've asked political leaders to keep repeating that message, and they have."

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